

## **BURKINA FASO 2010 Religious Freedom Report**

The constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

The government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the government during the reporting period.

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice; however, at times community members forced elderly women accused of being witches to flee their villages.

The U.S. government discusses religious freedom with the government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

### **Section I. Religious Demography**

The country has an area of 106,000 square miles and a population of 15.7 million (2010 estimate). The 2006 census stated that 61 percent of the population practices Islam, with the majority being Sunni. The government also estimated that 19 percent of the population is Roman Catholic, 15 percent maintain exclusively indigenous beliefs, and 4 percent are members of various Protestant denominations. Statistics on religious affiliation are approximate because Islam and Christianity are consistently practiced in tandem with indigenous religious beliefs.

Muslims reside largely in the northern, eastern, and western border regions, and Christians live in the center of the country. Persons practice indigenous religious beliefs throughout the country, especially in rural communities. Ouagadougou, the capital, has a mixed Muslim and Christian population. Bobo-Dioulasso, the second largest city, is mostly Muslim. Small Syrian and Lebanese immigrant communities reside in these two cities and are more than 90 percent Christian.

There are approximately 63 different ethnic groups. Most are religiously heterogeneous, but the Fulani and Dioula communities are majority Muslim.

### **Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom**

#### **Legal/Policy Framework**

The constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

The constitution and laws protect the right of individuals to choose and change their religion and provided the right to practice the religion of one's choice. The government observed and enforced these provisions. The country is a secular state. Islam, Christianity, and indigenous religious beliefs were practiced freely without government interference.

The government observes the following religious holidays as national holidays: the Birth of the Prophet Muhammad, Easter Monday, Ascension, Assumption, Eid al-Fitr, All Saints' Day, Eid al-Adha, and Christmas.

The government requires all organizations, religious or otherwise, to register with the Ministry of Territorial Administration. Registration confers legal status but no specific controls or benefits. According to the Freedom of Association Code, failure to register may result in a fine of \$108 to \$325 (50,000 to 150,000 cfa francs).

Religious organizations operated under the same regulatory framework for publishing and broadcasting rights as other entities.

Missionary groups occasionally faced complicated bureaucratic procedures, such as zoning regulations, in pursuit of particular activities; however, they did not experience bureaucratic procedures that were more onerous than those experienced by nonreligious groups.

Public schools did not offer religious instruction. Muslim, Catholic, and Protestant groups operated primary and secondary schools. Some tertiary institutions were also operated by Muslim and Christian organizations. Although school officials must submit the names of their directors to the government and register their schools, religious or otherwise, the government did not appoint or approve these officials.

The government did not fund religious schools, nor did it require them to pay taxes unless they conducted for-profit activities. The government reviewed the curricula of religious schools to ensure that they offer the full standard academic curriculum; however, it did not seek to influence religious curricula.

#### Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the government during the reporting period.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

#### Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion.

## Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

The government gave all religious groups equal access to registration and routinely approved their applications. The government taxed religious groups only if they engaged in commercial activities, such as farming or dairy production. The Ministry of Security had the right to request copies of proposed publications and broadcasts to verify that they were in accordance with the stated nature of the religious group; however, there were no reports that religious broadcasters experienced difficulties with this regulation.

### Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice; however, at times community members forced elderly women accused of being witches to flee their villages. During the reporting period, 18 such cases reportedly happened. The Catholic Church-run Delwende Shelters in Ouagadougou cared for 365 of these women at these shelters. The Ministry of Social Action and National Solidarity, along with religious and other nongovernmental organizations, maintained similar shelters in Ouagadougou, and Yako and Tema Bokin, Passore Province. The ministry has also initiated sensitization programs with villages and also helped with mediation efforts between suspected witches and village notables.

### Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. government discusses religious freedom with the government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

The embassy sent two participants to the International Visitor Project "Religious Tolerance and Interfaith Dialogue" in May 2009 and one more to a second installment of the project in October 2009. The embassy also sent two participants to the Bamako Interfaith Dialogue Conference in July 2009 and sent two others to the International Visitors Project "U.S. Political Process for Young Muslim Leaders" also in July 2009. In September 2009 the embassy held an iftar (evening meal during Ramadan) and conference in Ouagadougou.